

Immanuel United Church
The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany
Jan 30th, 2022

Welcome

Hi everyone! On this third Sunday of Epiphany, today, we continue to explore the gift of Epiphany. Also, our Stewardship Campaign and stories continue too. Epiphany marks the Nativity story of three wise ones following an unusual star until it stopped over the place where the baby Jesus was. "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy."

The next three Epiphany services at Immanuel, including today's, have been created with the use of the United Church stewardship service resource, "Discover Your Gifts — Share Your Gifts (Five Sundays in Epiphany)" (https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2021-10/ctb-2022_discover-gifts-share-gifts.docx) to help our community of faith take a closer look at what a variety of texts have to say about gifts that are revealed to us — what it means to share those gifts as a fundamental part of discipleship.

These worship resources were collaboratively prepared by: Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in the Atlantic Regions (who lives in Riverview, New Brunswick); Evan Δ∩^α Smith, Toronto Urban Native Ministry, Shining Waters Region; Ian March-MacCuish, First United Church, Mount Pearl, NL, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region; and Matthew Fillier, Lead Minister of Bedford United Church, Bedford, NS, Region 15.

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Discover your gifts. Share your gifts. It's what disciples of Jesus do.

Greeting

God is good

All the time.

All the time

God is good.

Settler Acknowledgement of Our Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Long before my people journeyed to this land, Indigenous people were here (*Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation*), and they received from their Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. When they shared their vision, my people did not hear. My people tried to force Indigenous peoples to be like us, and, in so doing, we helped to destroy the vision that made them what they were.

We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that our church did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.

We pray that all Indigenous people will hear the sincerity of our words today and that they will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future.

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

We light this candle, honouring the One who said "I am the Light."

Call to Worship:

Jesus embraced his friends with love.

Let us witness to God with our arms.

Jesus wept when his friends experienced grief.

Let us witness to God with our hearts.

Jesus healed people with his touch.

Let us witness to God with our hands.

Jesus taught in the synagogues.

Let us witness to God with our ears.

Jesus walked alongside the oppressed.

Let us witness to God with our feet.

Jesus taught us that to experience life to its fullest

requires our entire selves.

Let us worship God with all of our selves: mind, body, soul, and spirit.

Opening Prayer:

Creator of all, you call us into community, to work together as one body. Be with us today as we join our hearts and voices to bring praise to you who have perfectly created each of us. Help us to see past our perceived imperfections to see the beauty you created in us and in the world. Accept the praise of your family as we reach out to you, and each other, in worship and adoration. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray.

Hymn: VU 48 **I Can Feel You Near Me God**

Exploring the Epiphany Box:

Put pieces from “Mr./Mrs. Potato Head” toys into the gift box wrapped and decorated with ribbons, bows, and so on. Show the box to the group. Ask them what they like best about it. Ask them what they think is inside such a pretty box. Take out the pieces one by one and ask people to stick them onto the potato figurine. Ask them what the pieces are for. Can you hear with an eye? How do people use body parts in different ways? (*For example, we speak with our mouths, or we can speak with our hands through ASL.*) Ask if any of the parts are better than others. How can they be used in beneficial ways? Even though each part of our body does a different thing, it is still a gift. All parts of the body are useful, important!

Song: *This Little Light of Mine*

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Imagine the kind of world we would have if we thought of all gifts and all giving as being extraordinary because they remind us that all we have is a gift from God to be shared with each other?

How would sharing this gift remind others that they, too, are a gift?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

One Body with Many Members

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

The Choir Anthem: Every Time I Feel the Spirit

Reflection: We, the Anointed Ones

(By Evan ㄇㄢ Smith, Toronto Urban Native Ministry)

We can learn a lot about the possession of land and riches from Indigenous communities. Every nation has their own creation story that points to the connection between human life and land. People are woven into creation along with the land and its resources. Indigenous teachings speak in many different ways about how Mother Earth is there to provide us with everything we need. She gives us our clothing, shelter, medicines, food, beauty, water. She sustains us, and we sustain her.

Our creation story in Genesis tells us that God has created an interconnected world in which everything works together for the benefit of everyone, right down to the food we eat. We can see this interconnectedness in Corinthians which tells us that we are all parts of the same body. And we know that the body functions best when it is working together. Each of our bodies has a story to tell: stories of babies and marathons, age and love, work and rest. We use our bodies in different ways. Some of us have parts that work better than others (*You may want to add a personal anecdote. For instance, I would note that "Sometimes, my hip arthritis makes me waddle a little bit like a penguin" to lighten it up.*) Some of us have parts that we use in different ways: some of us use our fingers to read or our hands to speak. Each of our bodies are unique, but none is better than any other. They are different, but not superior.

Unfortunately, this is not how history, or our present day, has always seen bodies. We are supposed to be treating our bodies, and the bodies of others, as part of God's creation: beautiful, unique, and sacred, something that we should care for with just as much love as we offer the land and the water. Sadly, often our society treats our bodies with the same disregard that is often shown to our land and water resources. Despite the fact that there is more than enough of what we need for everyone, we still live in a world with marked disparity between the rich and the poor. We still live in a world where people have power and other people do not. And we know that this system is failing us. All too often our bodies are seen as nothing more than capital, used to make money for a system that places more value on some people than on others, and where our worth is measured by our ability to be financially productive. But this is not what God commanded of us.

In today's reading, "the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4: 19) most likely refers to the year of Jubilee which is described in Leviticus 25. Every 50 years, the Israelites are to release their indentured servants. Creditors are to return properties to their rightful owners. Outstanding debts are to be forgiven. The Jubilee ensures that the poor are cared for and that the hoarding of land and wealth is made incredibly difficult. In this passage, God also makes it very clear that "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land" (Leviticus 25: 23–24). God

commands us to share our resources, to ensure that there is economic justice, to make sure that inequities are eliminated.

We know as a church that we have not always lived out that commandment. We have not always been welcoming to the stranger in our midst. We have a history that we need to acknowledge: our involvement in residential schools, our silencing of minority voices, the years of pain and trauma that our 2LGBTQI community has gone through. There have been, and continue to be, many times when our church body has not worked together the way it should, or when we have placed a higher value on some parts of the body of Christ than others.

Yet, we are an Easter people. We know that with God there is always a chance for new beginnings and new relationships.

When I think of those new beginnings and relationships, I think of Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM). This ministry began in 1996, when Eileen Antone from Oneida saw a need for places to worship in Toronto that were welcoming to Indigenous people, and where Indigenous cultures and traditions could be incorporated into worship. She approached what was then Toronto Conference, and the Conference agreed to use Mission & Service money to hire a minister for TUNM: Elder Grafton Antone, Eileen's husband.

Over the years, this little church plant grew, eventually becoming an ecumenical ministry shared with the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. TUNM is a good example of what can happen when the whole body of Christ works together and when resources are shared.

Now, 26 years after TUNM started, it has three staff and reaches more than 90,000 people each year through culturally appropriate street outreach, harm reduction work, prison ministry, hospital chaplaincy, worship, Traditional ceremonies, and reconciliation work. This is just one of many examples of the ways in which our Mission & Service dollars can have a greater impact on our communities than we can imagine.

Today's reading from Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue in his home community of Nazareth. The writer makes a special point of telling us that Jesus went "as was his custom" (Luke 4: 16). Jesus was not someone who only attended religious services on High Holy Days. He was someone who continued throughout his life to participate in the weekly gatherings of the faithful. We are taught by Jesus' example that being a part of the life and work of the congregation is integral to how we are to live.

Jesus went into the synagogue and chose a reading from Isaiah that speaks of bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, and letting the oppressed go free. He

begins his reading with the same words Isaiah spoke: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me" (Luke 4: 18). This is the same Spirit that was given to us during Pentecost, which means that *we* have also been anointed to carry out this task.

We have a choice as individuals and as a church. We can choose to continue in the same way or we can be open to the possibility that God's Spirit continues to blow through the walls of this church, calling us to live our lives and our faith in the best ways possible: the ways that will allow all parts of the body of Christ to be lifted up and valued. As followers of Jesus, the one who went all the way to the cross to show us the importance of standing in solidarity with the marginalized among us, we live into the promise that God's Spirit is upon us, calling us to ensure that the year of Jubilee is not a far-off dream, but a daily reality in our bodies, our homes, our communities, and the world. And we also live with the promise that we never do this work alone. Together, as parts of Christ's body within this community of faith, and as one community of faith among all that make up The United Church of Canada, we are making a difference.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn: VU 29 *Hark the Glad Sound*

Stewardship Story: Living Our Faith In the World

The work of our Cluster has been done in new ways this year. So this is what we have tried to do.

Harvest, has continued with a modified way of sharing food with those who come each month. The creative Harvest volunteers have faithfully been coming out on Harvest Mondays, setting up the food tables and greeting the folks as they come to pick up their food.

A wonderful gift arrived before Christmas. The grade five class of students at Neil Campbell School, pulling nine wagon loads of non perishable food arrived at the Church with food they had gathered for our Harvest folk as well as a gift of money. What a wonderful gift from these students and teachers.

A few of our activities had to be postponed due to Covid protocols, Just Christmas, and Amnesty International, although the latter was carried out by individuals at home.

The School Breakfast was changed although the children received their meal which was served by School personnel. We have continued our financial commitment to this program and we hope soon that we can again volunteer in person with these children.

The S.N.O.W. Night ~ although we weren't able to volunteer in person, we did receive gifts for the women which they are always eager to receive.

Sharing Christmas was once again generously supported by the congregation. We received so many lovely items of clothing, games, and gifts of food for Harvest. We also received \$2200, which was shared with LITE, Agape Table, Manitoba International Immigration Council, 1 Just City and Manitoba Harvest. We had a new project last year which was to make at least 12 dozen sandwiches once a month for St. Matthews Community Ministry for the many people who daily came in need of food.

We couldn't participate in any of these programs without our wonderful, supportive congregation. Thank you to the volunteers for their dedication and love, without all of us working together, none of this could happen. So, a big thank you.

~Ruth Campbell

Offering Invitation:

Our offerings of time, talent, and money will gratefully be received. Now is the opportunity to share your gifts to further the work of Immanuel United Church and the Spirit's task.

Sharing Christmas Report for 2021

Your generous gifts were gratefully received and distributed as follows: Agape Table: inner city kids' breakfast also hot lunch program \$500

*Harvest Manitoba 3 boxes food \$600 LITE: inner city employment advocates \$300
Manitoba Interfaith Immigration: refugee support \$400*

One Just City: inner city ministries

Inner City Christmas Store at St Matthews Maryland Ministry

We helped provide gifts & wrapping for 73 families including 266 children.

Total Gifts: loving support for health and hope \$2200

The second Mission & Service video:

United Church camps

The incredible difference your gifts make: Bill's Story <https://youtu.be/Cs-JTMFt5TE>

MV 191 *What Can I Do?*

What can I do? What can I bring?

What can I say? What can I sing?

I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.

I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

(followed by)

MV 196 *We Will Take What You Offer*

We will take what you offer, we will live by your word;

We will love one another and be fed by you, God. (X2)

Prayer:

God, we offer these gifts to you knowing that you have called us to work together. Bless them, multiply them, and use them to enable us, your body, to create a better world with all of creation. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Hymn: *Christ Has No Body Now but Yours*

Commissioning:

God has given each of us a part in the body of Christ.
It doesn't matter if you are an arm, or a leg, or a hand; God has a use and a purpose for you.
And whatever you do, do it in love,
knowing that you have been called to be the church,
to celebrate God's presence,
Crucified and Risen,
our Judge and our Hope.

Benediction:

**May the perfect love of God,
and the unending grace of Jesus
and the presence of our comforter, the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and with everyone you meet.
Amen.**